

Cultural correction is critical by Rod Watson

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We've tried bringing back the Homicide Squad. We've tried community meetings ad nauseam, including one Tuesday night in the Delavan-Grider Community Center.

We've tried reaching out to gang members via groups like the Stop the Violence Coalition.

What do such efforts have in common, besides failing to stop carnage like last weekend's quadruple homicide?

They all treat symptoms. Not that such efforts don't help. Take away the Buffalo Police Department changes or the efforts of groups like Stop the Violence and FATHERS, and the body count would be higher.

But the truth is we're sticking fingers in the dike while being awash in a cultural tsunami.

Somehow we—meaning blacks— have to reclaim the culture that sets the norms and reaches far more young people every day than community groups or the police ever will.

Arlee Daniels Jr., chairman of the Stop the Violence Coalition, hinted at that the other day when speculating that the City Grill gunman was influenced by TV, gangsta rap and violent video games. It's easy to dismiss such answers, until you realize they come from someone who was a gang leader, who counsels gang members and knows what they respond to.

So how did black culture get kidnapped, and take so many young people with it? Many recall the 1960s movement that equated black empowerment with strident—even violent—opposition to the white power structure and its ingrained racism. Music and movies reflected the changing mindset, evolving from sugary Motown into confrontational social commentary and advocacy.

But rather than courageously rejecting the worst of U. S. society, a significant element embraced it. In a deadly irony, too many adopted the same predatory mindset of Wall Street vultures, albeit with deadlier weapons. Lost on them is the fact that their mental bondage runs contrary to what the black liberation movement was supposed to be about.

We've gone from the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron to a kind of KKK in black face with nice rhymes, glorifying the annihilation of other blacks. Instead of courageous, they've been co-opted, sell-outs to values inimical to the community.

But instead of ostracizing them for that, African-Americans buy it. The carnage won't stop until that stops; every other change is just a Band-Aid.

At Tuesday night's meeting, one woman noted that those who see youth doing wrong and don't correct them are just as culpable. I'd add: Those who buy the junk that sets the cultural norm for black-on-black murder are just as culpable.

Using the spotlight now on Buffalo, Daniels said the coalition—through local members of Congress—will try to get President Obama to convene a Camp David-style summit to put public pressure on artists to clean up the culture. I wish him luck.

But the real pressure will come from black consumers. No other group so willingly finances its own genocide.

Meanwhile, club owners want to make it uncomfortable for thugs to come downtown so that they, in effect, stay on the East Side where they belong. Though no one puts it that crudely, that's the upshot, despite the "we don't want violence anywhere" bromides.

But I don't blame those businessmen. If I'd invested big money downtown, I'd have the same preoccupation. The black community would be an afterthought, even though its costs are rung up in lives, not dollars.

But that just brings us back to what's always been true: No one will save black folks except black folks. The cultural correction won't happen overnight, but it needs to start somewhere.

Maybe it'll start today, after the first of the four funerals.